

**Statement of the  
Video Software Dealers Association**

**Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
United States Senate**

**March 21, 2000**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for allowing the Video Software Dealers Association (VSDA) to submit a statement for the record at the hearing on the impact of interactive violence on children.

We want to assure the committee that VSDA and our members are concerned about the level of youth violence in our society. While we have no expertise in the relationship between video game violence and youth violence, the home video industry believes we have a role to play in helping parents ensure that their children do not gain access to video games that the parents deem inappropriate for them. We want to share with you the actions we have taken to assist parents in this regard and enlist your involvement in this effort.

Established in 1981, the Video Software Dealers Association is a not-for-profit international trade association for the \$17 billion home entertainment industry. VSDA represents over 3,000 companies throughout the United States, Canada, and 22 other countries. Membership comprises the full spectrum of video retailers (both independents and large chains), as well as the home video divisions of all major and independent motion picture studios, video game and multimedia producers, and other related businesses that constitute and support the home video entertainment industry.

Video game sales and rentals are an important and increasing segment of the home video industry. In 1998, the domestic home video game market generated about \$2.7 billion in software sales and about \$800 million in rental revenue.

The members of VSDA agree with the premise that the best control is parental control. As stated in the final report of the Congressional Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence, which was issued two weeks ago, "[p]arents and other adults responsible for the development of children should be vigilant about protecting them from exposure to inappropriate programming." There is no better place than in a home video store for parents to control the content of the video games and movies to which their children have access. For this reason, VSDA-member retailers have taken action to aid parents in making more-informed

entertainment choices for their families. We do this through a program we call “Pledge to Parents.”

The centerpiece of Pledge to Parents, established by VSDA in 1991, is a commitment by participating retailers:

1. Not to rent or sell videotapes or video games designated as “restricted” to persons under 17 without parental consent, including all movies rated “R” by the Motion Picture Association of America and all video games rated “M” by the Entertainment Software Rating Board.
2. Not to rent or sell videotapes rated “NC-17” by the Motion Picture Association of America or video games rated “Adults Only” by the Entertainment Software Rating Board to persons aged 17 or under.

In addition, as part of the Pledge to Parents program, many retailers solicit from customers written instructions regarding what types of video games and movies can be rented or purchased by family members. For instance, a customer can limit all of his or her children, regardless of age, to videos rated “E” (Everyone: content suitable for age six and older) by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, or indicate that one child is permitted to rent “E” games while another can rent “T” (Teen: content suitable for age 13 and older). Thus, our voluntary system allows parents, if they so choose, to be even more restrictive than any industry- or government-enforced system would be.

In 1999, we updated our Pledge to Parents materials and provided the revised kit, at no cost, to each retail member of VSDA. We have also offered to provide the materials at cost to any other video retailer that requests them.

Each Pledge to Parents kit contains the following:

- ***Customer Flyer and Parental Consent Form*** – These materials provide information about the Pledge to Parents program and allow customers to indicate their restrictions or authorizations on video and video game rentals and sales by their family members.
- ***Terminal-Topper Sign*** – This sign, to be displayed near the cash register, draws customers’ attention to Pledge to Parents and the retailer’s ratings enforcement policy.
- ***ID Check Sign*** – We encourage retailers to post this sign, which indicates that IDs will be checked when appropriate, throughout their store and remind customers of the retailer’s voluntary ratings enforcement policy.
- ***Video Game Ratings Poster and Brochures*** – The poster and brochures are designed to help customers make informed decisions concerning their children’s video game rentals.
- ***MPAA Theatrical-Size Ratings Poster*** – This poster provides customers with movie ratings information to further assist them with their selection of movies.

We have encouraged our members to make maximum use of the Pledge to Parents materials and provide ratings and content information to customers of all ages. We also have strongly

urged our members to check IDs whenever appropriate. We are pleased to report that the response to this program from our members has been extremely positive.

As part of the relaunch of Pledge to Parents, we conducted a substantial public outreach campaign that reached millions of consumers through television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. The purpose of this campaign was to make parents aware of the resources available to them in video stores.

And we think parents are taking this message to heart. By and large, parents appear to be making good choices for their children's game playing and movie viewing. According to VSDA's VidTrac for the week ending March 12, 2000, all of the 10 top renting video games, and 21 of the top 25, were rated "E" or "T."

The voluntary Pledge to Parents program demonstrates our industry's commitment to the communities in which we live. Video stores and their employees are part of the neighborhoods where they are located. They often know their customers by name. They know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in their communities. They take pride in the entertainment they bring into people's homes. And they realize that their reputations and livelihoods are on the line every time they sell or rent a video game or movie. Video retailers would not put their businesses at risk by providing to children games that their parents don't want them to have.

Finally, we must keep in mind that, in addressing the issue of violence in American society, the government cannot infringe the constitutional rights of video retailers and consumers—or of parents to raise their families as they see fit. Ultimately the responsibility for raising children lies with their parents, not the government and certainly not video store clerks.

Recognizing this, the Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence recommended that members of Congress meet with the entertainment industry to learn more about entertainment ratings systems and how to communicate information about the ratings systems to parents. We would be pleased to work with you to implement this recommendation.

The nation's video stores are doing their part to make sure that America's children are not exposed to violent video games without their parents' consent. Home video provides parents with the greatest control of their children's electronic game playing. Voluntary programs, such as VSDA's Pledge to Parents, are the best way to help parents exercise that control.

Thank you.